

Lessons Learned

Writing has always been a significant part of my life, both for school and just as sheer entertainment. However, this year we were presented with the task of completing our seventh grade portfolios that would be a large part in determining where our lives went from here. Rather, where we were to go to high school, but it's all relative. I have to admit, I was afraid at first. If my portfolio score was low, I wouldn't be able to get into a decent high school. From there, my chances of being recognized by a decent college wouldn't be very good either. It seemed everything hung in the balance of having an amazing portfolio for the year. Interestingly enough, even though I succeeded in this goal and now have what seems to be a promising future, I'm most thankful for my growth as a writer, not for how my portfolio itself came out. My writing has developed so much over not only this year but all of the years I've been writing, and with the help of my peers and teachers I finally came to realize this. Quite frankly, I find the drastic improvements amazing.

One thing I've learned for sure is how much my writing is affected by where I am in life. If I'm having a tough week and I'm stressed out, my writing reflects that. Likewise, if I'm happy and filled with energy, that shows up too. It took awhile to figure this out, and it wasn't until I was reviewing a few of my pieces that I started to catch on. We'd been studying the concept of an author's voice coming through in their writing that week in language arts, and though I noticed a general voice used throughout my pieces I found that at different times in the year how I wrote changed dramatically. Sometimes the pieces were dry and cruel, and others they were light and humorous. I immediately became interested in the seemingly random changes in my style and searched almost incessantly for an explanation. The very answer I was looking for came to me when I was reviewing the dates I wrote the separate pieces. If I was fighting with a friend or things were difficult at home, the pieces tended to be darker, or in other words, reflections of that mood. This theory worked the same for all the different extreme moods I'd experienced whilst writing the pieces. Now I just needed to figure out how to channel and control these emotions to help get the tone right in my pieces. Though it sounds a little odd to mix the two, I turned to another one of my hobbies to help me; acting. It took a good bit of time, but I learned to, essentially, act as I wrote. If I was having a troublesome time but needed to write a lighthearted piece, I learned to move these feelings to the side and act happier in order to have it reflected in my piece. I've always been very emotionally connected to all of my writing so finally learning to restrict certain feelings in order to achieve a certain tone became invaluable to my writing.

However, mastering my emotions was only the first step in my growth as a writer. Next I had to incorporate that skill into learning how to look at my pieces and really be able to revise. All my life I'd had difficulty with revision. It felt like once a piece had been written it should be just that, written and finished. Why bother trying to return to the same feeling and idea that you wrote weeks or even months ago? I knew why I should, but getting myself to go through with it was a whole other story. I again learned to bring in acting, this time to return to the feelings or thoughts that I'd used to

write the piece in the first place. It wasn't quite enough, however, because even though I got to the point where I could revise, I still wasn't sure exactly what I should be changing. I always received a great amount of praise for my pieces, but rarely any suggestions. Sure, it makes you feel good about yourself and your pieces, but when it comes to revision it doesn't do you a lot of good. Then I was introduced to the wonders of author's chair. The concept was simple; the whole class pulls their chairs into a circle and reads and verbally revises one another's pieces. It was a sort of group peer revision, if you will. As I mentioned earlier, I rarely got any feedback on what to change, but I did, however, hear what was suggested to other people. Even though it wasn't given to me as an idea, I found it could often be applied to my own pieces as well. Success, I'd now found a way to get suggestions for my pieces, however indirect it may have been.

Possibly the most important factor, however, was exactly what I learned to revise in my pieces. The first and likely most beneficial skill I worked to master was my transitions. By this, I mean not only from paragraph to paragraph as I changed ideas but even simply from sentence to sentence as I worked to complete a single thought. Having a sort of unity in my pieces was something I knew I needed. If a piece is broken up, so to speak, or skips around from idea to idea too much, it becomes confusing for the reader and significantly more difficult for them to "digest". I first worked to improve this by looking up transitional words such as additionally, yet, or despite that could be used in place of the generic words such as and, the, but, and so on and so forth. I also learned to develop graphic organizers to help avoid skipping around in my thoughts. As the year continued, I grew better and better at having organized pieces where my thoughts could flow in a more natural manner.

While I worked on my transitions, I also had to keep a keen eye out for grammar. I'd always been an excellent speller and actually not too bad with grammar either, but I had trouble with run on sentences. In person I'm generally rather quiet, therefore I always find myself with quite a bit to say when I turn to paper and pencil to write my thoughts or opinions. Unfortunately, I often got carried away with this and carried sentences on longer than the rules of grammar permitted. My teacher strongly enforced grammar this year, so worksheets and lessons helped me to overcome this. Of course, I found it was also quite important to put effort into remembering it as I wrote and then revised. I couldn't just be taught it and expect it to be perfect, I had to work to incorporate what I learned into my writing. In time, I learned to do this as well.

I learned so much about myself as a writer and a person this year that I couldn't even begin to name them all. The most important skill was probably acting to keep a certain tone, but without good transitions or grammar I believe my pieces would have been lacking as well. Really, I don't think I ever had any reason to be afraid of my portfolio this year. As long as you give it your all and listen to the suggestions around you, you can come up with a wonderful piece of writing no matter what your skill level is. Of course, that's another thing that I just had to learn as the year went on.

Annotated only for content

Lessons Learned

*title begins
the focus on
growing as a writer
from lessons in
life*

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voice
begins to focus on writing abilities
claim about self as a writer
support for claim
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support for claim

area of growth

decision about area of growth - strategy to improve

area of growth as a writer

claim about self
1

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aware of audience's needs

describes strategy

area of growth

analysis

evaluates self as a writer

area of growth in writing

analysis of writing strategy

decision about writing ability